

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Bradley Erck
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Members:

James Allen
Robert Blanchard
Daniel Boody
Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Elise Cusack
Hon. David Dale
Hon. William Davignon
Brian Eldridge
Hon. Wright Ellis
Samuel Ferraro
Hon. Samuel Granieri
Hon. John Greenan
Patrick Keyes
Maria Lehman
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. Gerald Meal
Lawrence Meckler
Hal Morse
Laurence Rubin
Hon. Mark Schroeder
Kevin Schuler
John Simon
Hector Titus
Peter Wendel

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Hon. Albert DeBenedetti
Richard Geiger
Luke Rich
Stan Rydelek
John Sheffer, II

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting April 26, 2002

Present: Erck, Weinstein, Allen, Blanchard, Boody, Burmaster, Cusack, Dale, Davignon, Ellis, Ferraro, Greenan, Keyes, Lehman, Meal, Meckler (proxy), Morse, Schuler (proxy), Simon, Titus, Wendel, Geiger (proxy), Rydelek

Excused: Eldridge, Granieri, McMahon, Schroeder, Casale, DeBenedetti, Sheffer

Absent: Rich, Rubin

The meeting was called to order at 8:10 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chairs Bradley Erck and Barry Weinstein, MD. New member Robert Blanchard, Director of the Center for Community Economic Development Through Hospitality & Tourism at Niagara University, was welcomed. Minutes of the March, 2002 meeting were approved.

Subcommittee Chair John Simon presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval being granted for the ENRP to send a letter to the New York Power Authority endorsing the alternative method for power relicensing. Approval was also granted to recommend to the Erie and Niagara County Legislatures passage of a resolution asking the NFTA to allow the NCIDA to put together a financial and strategic plan for the Niagara Falls Airport, and to appoint ENRP Administrator Tod A. Kniazuk as the official ENRP representative to the BNE site readiness working group.

Subcommittee Member Wright Ellis presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval granted to receive updates on electronic permitting and bi-county regional planning at the April general meeting. Approval was also granted to designate a representative to serve on the regional planning working group. Ellis was designated as the ENRP representative.

Subcommittee Chair John Greenan presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with concept

approval granted for the Subcommittee to pursue developing more extensive tourism signage in Erie and Niagara Counties. Ferraro noted that this could be a potentially volatile issue, and as such the group must thoroughly canvas the community for ideas. Greenan replied that municipalities and the Western New York state delegation will be a part of the effort. Ferraro and ENRP Ad Hoc Member both offered assistance.

On the topic of publication of a bi-county visitors guide – which the subcommittee discussed and came to the conclusion that it was not practical to pursue due to competing hotel interests – Co-Chair Erck asked if there was a remedy to that problem. Rydelek replied that the biggest problem is hotel occupancy, but as we build more attractions that problem could disappear. The name change of the BNCVB also did not help. Greenan suggested that in the meantime perhaps a joint virtual guide could be published. ENRP Ad Hoc Member Proxy David Lacki noted that it seems to be a good time to at least begin talking about the issue. ENRP Member William Davignon suggested that we also include hoteliers in the discussion.

Subcommittee Chair Hal Morse presented the Transportation Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with approval granted to recommend that the Erie and Niagara County Legislatures pass resolutions asking CSX to return to a schedule of regular meetings with the two counties.

Co-Chair Erck introduced Phil Wilcox to speak about the AFL-CIO Economic Development Working Group. The group is working on training under-represented people from brownfields-impacted communities and brownfield remediation. The group does not want to duplicate existing efforts, but is looking to work with the building trades and other groups on brownfields issues.

Florine Luhr of the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise gave an update on the Site Readiness Working Group. The group is looking at a template of second tier sites (near shovel ready) and is collecting the data on those sites. Some of the partners involved in the working group are the Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation, the Erie County IDA, the GBNRTC, the Niagara County IDA, Empire State Development, Erie and Niagara Counties, municipalities, the BNE, the Buffalo Niagara Partnership, and ENRP. There is an ESD Build Now matching grant available to have work done to raise a site to shovel ready status. Ideally, these sites should be municipally owned. The working group will collectively pick sites to send in for the grant. They are also working to coordinate with GBNRTC's TIP plan to see how it relates to our sites. Marketing of the 17 shovel ready sites is also a goal of the group.

On brownfields, which were not listed in the first or second tier, the group is trying to see who's doing what on the issue; the BNP and UB already have efforts underway. UB received a grant to create a database that would tell you what needs to be done to remediate a site when you put in the pertinent data for the site. The BNP is hosting a brownfields summit on June 7. The working group wants to have some sort of role on the brownfields effort, but does not want to duplicate efforts.

Simon noted that development of big boxes has recently slowed down, and that it is smaller companies that are being worked on now. ENRP Member James Allen told Luhr that we should look at all the sites not chosen to see what's wrong with them, then rank them to keep getting them done. Luhr replied that said effort is underway. Co-Chair Weinstein added that you're always going to find the suburbs easier to develop, but we need to refocus on the cities. Allen said that we should prioritize sites based on economic development potential. Weinstein asserted that there should be an umbrella group formed for brownfields redevelopment. Ferraro replied that brownfields will be a part of the regional plan. On the database, ENRP Member Maria Lehman noted that you can get different rulings from the DEC and EPA. One of the functions of the database is to unify this. Wilcox added that there are geographic limitations on low cost power, and that could help in making brownfields more attractive.

Andrew Eszak of the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning gave an update on electronic permitting. A pilot project involving Erie County, the City of Tonawanda, Wales, Amherst, the Village of Hamburg, and Buffalo is underway. The county has developed a standardized building permit for these municipalities and is putting together a web site based from the erie.gov site. Niagara County will be included as well. Erie County and the UB Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth have had conversations about partnering on the project. The goal is to have the pilot up and running by the end of the year. On-line payment could be done through an e-check, and for a fee developers could tombstone their information for future use. One challenge in full implementation is having the municipalities accept the standardized form. The President of the Building Inspectors Association is on the committee and will take the form to the inspectors to build support. A second generation of the project will allow for submission of drawings on line. The county is working to see where the service should be housed, as it will take a lot of capacity to handle the drawings. ENRP's help is needed to sell this service to the communities.

Lehman added that her department is working on making their permits available on the site as well. Ferraro added that Niagara County is doing an evaluation of local needs and will go to the town supervisors association to get a nomination for the pilot group. He also noted that we're all enforcing

the same state codes, but using different forms to do so. Eszak added that the state codes are currently changing, so now's the time to standardize the forms as the municipalities are developing their new forms.

Ferraro gave the group an update on the regional planning framework. Without a regional planning board this region has lost significant federal and state funds. There has been a year and a half of background work on this by the two counties' planning departments. Now they are in the process of compiling the steering committee and subcommittee structure. There is a two-year time period for the initial draft document. Public meetings will be a part of this. Eszak added that the counties will not be micromanaging localities with this, but it will provide an overall framework to work from, as it will serve to give direction on such things as infrastructure. ENRP Member Peter Wendel noted that there has been an absolute lack of thought in making individual decisions without looking at the overall picture. **The ENRP voted to give full support to this bi-county planning initiative.**

Co-Chairs Erck and Weinstein led a discussion on casino gaming. Erck told the group that the Niagara County Legislature unanimously passed a resolution supporting municipally owned casinos. In Erie County, Weinstein said, there is also a resolution to support municipally owned casinos, but it has not yet found the level of support needed for passage. Despite the support of the counties for this, the state delegation told Erck that it doesn't have a chance. They also told him that local money for social costs associated with gaming will be discussed later. Weinstein then detailed the process needed to achieve municipally owned casinos. **The ENRP voted to support municipally owned casinos**, with Greenan voting in the negative.

Ferraro gave an update on power relicensing. A press event was recently held to announce Erie County's contribution of \$50,000 toward the effort. We need to keep working on relicensing, as 50,000 manufacturing jobs are tied to this.

Under old business Co-Chair Erck told the group that the State Senate and Assembly both passed the video arraignment legislation. It is now awaiting signature by the Governor. There was no new business. The next meeting will take place June 28, 2002 in Erie County. The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
June 21, 2002